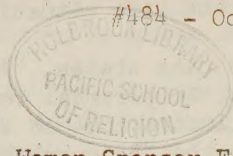


Japan Christian Activity News

IN THIS ISSUE:

'Christian Art in Asia' Reviewed
Korean Pastor Sues NHK-TV
Christians Study Buddhism
~~Asian Rural Institute Gives Thanks~~
~~Miscellaneous News~~

#484 - October 24, 1975
Women Sponsor Ecumenical Assembly
Clippings from the Japanese Press



BOOK REVIEW: CHRISTIAN ART IN ASIA, BY MASAO TAKENAKA

reviewed by B. D. Tucker

The appearance of this beautiful book is an event of great importance for Christians and for all those interested in art. It will open our eyes to a whole new world of which most of us have been unaware.

Because of the long domination of the West in many parts of the world, it was often assumed that Christian art must follow certain patterns and conventions of Western European art of the last five centuries. While some of the art of the Italian renaissance on Christian subjects was undoubtedly great art, it seems to me very questionable whether we can consider much of it really Christian. It was inspired by humanism, not by faith in the gospel. And it portrayed, not a Jewish, but a European Christ in Italian renaissance settings.

Unfortunately, by the time so-called "Christian art" was being introduced to the countries of Africa and Asia to be used in the churches, traditions started in the Italian renaissance and followed unimaginatively had degenerated to a mawkish sentimentality, without artistic merit or religious inspiration. This was what was too often labeled "Christian art" in the mission churches of the colonial period, and it was this that the local artists were taught to admire and imitate. Opinions differ, of course, in matters of taste, but for me, most of what is called Christian art in our churches is a hindrance, rather than a help, to faith, and aesthetically as well as religiously, I strongly dislike it.

Fortunately the colonial bonds have been broken, not only politically but spiritually, and people everywhere are beginning to express their faith in art, in the context of their own experiences, their joys and sorrows, their struggles and victories, and in the light of their own cultural traditions. Yet most of us have been unaware of the vitality of this art and this new Christian expression in various parts of the world. Professor Takenaka's book is an exciting discovery for many of us who would never have otherwise had a chance to see the hidden treasures which he has found in many lands and introduced to the wider world.

Aside from the illustrations, which are, of course, the main part of the book, there is an excellent interpretive introduction by Professor Takenaka, which enables us to see the new Christian art of Asia in its historical and cultural perspective. As he points out, the authentic expressions of art using native traditions did not necessarily mean the wholesale rejection of Western techniques or even traditions. There is no nostalgic return to the past, the primitive, the pre-modern world. That would be a denial of the context in which the artists actually live. Rather new techniques and new perspectives have been incorporated in the contemporary art, but the artists are now seeing things through their own eyes, and expressing their own ideas and experiences through their work, firmly rooted in their own traditions and cultures. Their works may often reflect revolutionary political and social

(cont'd)

EDITORS:

Subscriptions: JAPAN ¥1,500; OVERSEAS Airmail \$8.00, Seamail \$6.00

John Nakajima, Jim Stentzel, Lee Seaman

NATIONAL CHRISTIAN COUNCIL Room 24, 3-18 Nishiwaseda 2-chome Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160 Japan

NOTE: Permission to reprint is granted to all media on conditions that (1) full credit is given and (2) a copy is sent to the editors.

situations, where the struggle for freedom and justice forms an indispensable part of their heritage and life situation.

Professor Takenaka states, "Authentic Christian art contains a confession of Christian faith as the personal response of the artist in a particular situation." (p. 28) In the illustrations of the artists' works we can often comprehend this confession, and in the "Biographical Notes" at the end of the book we can understand something of the situations in which they lived and worked.

The book contains 120 plates showing the works of artists in eighteen Asian and Pacific countries (including a few from Australia and New Zealand). Fifty-eight of the plates are in color, adding greatly to the beauty and value of the book. But the black and white plates are equally impressive. I found the sculpture unexpectedly fine. But many of the paintings and other works impressed me just as strongly. Many of these works kindled fresh religious insights and understandings. This is no doubt because we are able in art to see the gospel through other eyes. My appreciation of beauty was greatly widened through contemplating the vision of other cultures which I had not known well before.

To appreciate the book, though, one must see it. It remains only to thank Professor Takenaka for this valuable and beautiful book, and the Kyo Bun Kwan and Christian Conference of Asia for bringing it out. It is hoped that an edition with a Japanese text will also be made available.

(*Christian Art in Asia* is available from Kyo Bun Kwan, 4-5-1 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104, Japan; 171 pages; ¥4500/\$15.

This review was originally written for translation into Japanese and publication in *Doshisha Jiho*. --Eds.)

* * * * *

KOREAN PASTOR SUES JAPAN BROADCASTING CORP.

What's in a name? A lot, say the Korean residents of Japan--especially those who remember the humiliation of being forced to take Japanese names in 1939 by the Japanese colonial rulers of Korea.

The Rev. Choe Chang Hwa, pastor of a Korean church in Kita-Kyushu, had that unforgettable experience at the age of nine while living in what is now north Korea. Today, at age 45, Rev. Choe adamantly insists on being called by the Korean reading of his name, which is not the current custom in Japan.

On August 26, Rev. Choe briefed newsmen about an open letter he had written to the mayor of Kita-Kyushu concerning the human rights of the 640,000 Korean residents of Japan. During the interview, Rev. Choe repeatedly mentioned that the Chinese characters for his name should be read as "Choe Chang Hwa" (the Korean reading) and not as "Sai Sho Ka" (the Japanese reading).

Despite his insistence, the local television station of the Japan Broadcasting Corp. (NHK) reported about the letter written by "Sai Sho Ka". The Protestant pastor visited NHK's Kita-Kyushu television station the following day to protest the pronunciation and to demand a correction. The chief of the broadcasting section refused, telling Rev. Choe that the Japanese reading was "customary".

Maintaining that a name is a symbol of personal character, national identity and racial pride, Rev. Choe took his case to the Kokura branch of the Fukuoka District Court on October 3. His suit demands that NHK pay him ¥1 as a token of apology. "Just as a name is the basic human being, one yen is the basic currency,"

(cont'd)

Korean Pastor Sues NHK-TV (cont'd)

said Rev. Choe. He is also demanding that NHK publicly apologize to him on the air and that the apology be published in four leading Japanese dailies.

Although no apology has been printed to date, Rev. Choe's protest has gained considerable coverage in the Japanese media. The Asahi Shimbun, Japan's largest daily newspaper, has had two major stories on the case. One, in the page-one "Tensei Jingo" column, was very sympathetic towards Choe's appeal but concluded that the whole issue of Koreans' names was simply "most difficult". Another story quoted at length a Japanese linguistics professor who said that the Japanese people could benefit from learning other people's languages and pronouncing their names correctly.

The NCCJ Human Rights Committee for Aliens in Japan decided October 20 to support Rev. Choe's demands. Citing the "long history of Japanese forcing Koreans to change their names", the committee said that NHK was guilty of discrimination by refusing to use Korean names. The committee strongly demanded that NHK admit its mistake and accept Rev. Choe's requests. Furthermore, the committee said this would be a good occasion for NHK to (1) teach its employees basic Korean, and (2) hire Korean employees.

While some Japanese, including Christians, are backing Rev. Choe, others have shown their distaste for the south Korean pastor. He has received several angry or threatening letters saying "If you don't like the Japanese reading of your name, then why don't you return to Korea" or "I eagerly hope someday there will be no Koreans in Japan; you are a heavy burden in Asia."

Rev. Choe was given the Japanese name "Takayama Shoka" under the Imperial decree of 1939. With the Japanese defeat in 1945, his full Korean name was legally reassumed but in most cases was read in the Japanese way. Even in recent years, the Koreans in Japan have been split on the issue: some, hide their background in order to survive in a discriminatory society; others, insist on their Korean names; and still others don't appear to care much either way.

The custom of Japanese readings of the names in Christian characters is as old as Japanese use of Chinese characters since the seventh century. The NCC's decision challenges this practice in order to respect the identity of every human being, Korean or Chinese.

* * * * *

CHRISTIANS STUDY BUDDHISM

To give missionaries and Japanese pastors opportunities to deepen their understanding of the spiritual background of the Japanese people, the NCC Center for the Studies of Japanese Religions, recently arranged two seminars on Japanese Buddhism. B.D. Tucker, a Sei-ko-kai (Anglican) missionary and JCAN correspondent, wrote Part I below. Notto R. Thelle, Assistant Director of the NCC Center in Kyoto who is with the Scandinavian Christian Doyukai, contributed Part II.

--Eds.

I. Seminar on Jōdo Shinshu

"If even a good man can be born in the Pure Land, how much more so a wicked man!" So spoke Shinran Shonin in the Tanisho; and of himself he said: "Of good and evil I am totally ignorant...I am an ordinary mortal full of passion and desire, living in this transient world like the dweller in a house of fire. Every judgment of mine, whatever I say, is nonsense and gibberish. The Nembutsu alone is true."

(cont'd)

CHRISTIANS STUDY BUDDHISM (cont'd)

To learn more about this extraordinary, humble and holy man, and about his teaching, some thirty-five Protestant and Roman Catholic overseas missionaries gathered at the Kansai Seminar House in Kyoto October 3, and at Higashi Honganji on October 4. The meeting, sponsored by the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions, was led by Professor Masatoshi Doi.

On the first afternoon Professors Shojun Bando and Shunsho Terakawa of Otani University gave lectures on "The Gospel According to Shinran" and "Jodo Shinshu Today in the Light of its History." Both presentations were well-received and gave a good picture of Shinran (1173-1262) and his doctrine of pure grace and absolute dependance on Amida, apart from works; and of Jodo Shinshu (the True Pure Land Sect), in which the followers of Shinran concentrate heart and soul in the saying of the Nembutsu, "Namu Amida Butsu" (Reliance on Amida Buddha). They trust that Amida, not because they have done anything to deserve it, but out of sheer benevolence, will cause them to be born again into the Pure Land.

The next day the meeting was held in the Hall of Religion in the Higashi Honganji compound, the headquarters of the Otani Branch of Jodo Shinshu, and one of the biggest temples in the world. There Cabinet Chief Priest Minefuji gave a welcoming and introductory speech, and several other leaders answered questions. Their friendliness, sincerity and openness in discussing problems within their group made a very good impression on participants.

Although the life of Shinran and the main teachings of Jodo Shinshu are dealt with in numerous books in English, the questions, answers and discussions shed light on many areas not so well known. There was a good deal of discussion of the layman's movement, the Dobokai, which has reinvigorated many dormant temples. The enthusiastic members are often critical of the hereditary priest-hoods in the temples and within the highest hierarchy itself. The recent Marxist approach to Nichiren Buddhists was discussed, but it was felt that it was probably only a temporary political maneuver to gain popular support. It was also felt that there was too great a gap between the other-worldliness of Jodo Shinshu and the materialism of Marxism to make real cooperation possible.

The priests were asked about the position of women in the Otani-ha. There are women's organizations (Fujinkai) and a priests' wives' (Bomori) organization which is quite influential. Since the war women have been permitted to become priests, but as yet they may not enter the high-priesthood (Juyaku). In this respect the leaders confessed they are not as "liberated" as the Nishi Honganji or Hompa Branch of the Jodo Shinshu. They also agreed that many of these things were not in the true spirit of Shinran's teaching, who treated all as equals. It was pointed out that one of their three special Sutras states there are no women in the Pure Land. Professor Bando said that at the time the Sutra was written, it was thought that a women's nature was one of dependence on earthly things, and that women would therefore be reincarnated as men before entering; but that with a new understanding of women, "women," in this context might be interpreted symbolically as meaning those with worldly dependence.

It was interesting to hear that after the war the leaders had gone to Professor Doi to try to understand what Sangha (Brotherhood-fellowship) ought to be, and had learned much from Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics in this respect. Their familiarity with the Bible, Christian theology and Western philosophy was often impressive. Participants rated the conference "very good" because it ended with a better understanding and mutual respect and fellowship on both sides.

--B.D. Tucker

II. Seminar on Obaku-Zen

The Jodo Shinshu session contrasted sharply with a September seminar on Zen, also sponsored by the NCC Center in Kyoto. With its deep solidarity with the weak and sinful man, Jodo Shinshu has become a faith for the common people. It has always maintained a critical spirit of protest against the established political and religious authorities. Within the Otani branch of Jodo Shinshu itself, a grassroots reform movement criticizes the conservative hierarchy with its Imperial ties and advocates return to the radical gospel of Shinran. This reform movement is engaged in social and political problems. It has taken part in the protest against efforts to nationalize Yasukuni Shrine and is concerned with the buraku (outcast) problem.

This impression of protest spirit was totally lacking when 50 national pastors gathered to a seminar on Obaku-Zen at the head temple Manpuku-ji in Uji, south of Kyoto, September 3-5. This branch of Buddhism came to Japan under the protection of the authoritarian Tokugawa regime, and grew rapidly in a period when Christians were persecuted all over Japan. Obaku-Zen still seems to lack political concern, but at the same time supports and/or is supported by reactionary force.

However, the participants did not come to inquire about political attitudes, but to learn more about Zen, listen to lectures and to take part in morning and evening sessions of Zazen (sitting meditation) under the guidance of the Zen Master Genmyō Murase. Among Japanese Christians an awareness is growing of the great importance of the encounter with Zen. Catholics have often been more to take Zen seriously and have given valuable insights for Christians. However, also in the Protestant churches where the contemplative tradition is weak Zen can provide a basis both for a critical self-examination and for a new search for true prayer. Several Christians have through the encounter with Zen re-discovered the importance of silence as a way to open their hearts to the presence of God.

--Notto R. Thelle

WOMEN SPONSOR ECUMENICAL ASSEMBLY

In spite of the cold October rain, about 400 Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox women gathered at Tokyo Cathedral on October 18th for the first Ecumenical Church Women Assembly under the title, "Life together in Christ."

At the afternoon panel discussion on the four topics of welfare, education, family life and mission, Ms. Kei Maeda of the Tokyo YWCA emphasized that welfare is not a special benevolent action for special people. Instead it should be a matter of concern to all people who live with others in this society. Likewise Ms. Junko Takamizawa, a writer and editor of the women's magazine Shinto no Tomo, stressed that mission should be carried out by everyone, at any time and any place. Sister Setsuko Omizo of Sakura no Seibo Gakuin spoke from her experiences as junior high and high school principal, stressing the importance of education for justice. Ms. Sumie Tanaka, writer, and dramatist, spoke of the important influence of Christian families in this non-Christian society.

Group discussion by all participants followed the panel. Closing worship included a common prayer for the assembly. The Participants represented most of the Christian denominations in Japan. Some came from as far as Tohoku and Hokkaido.

"Year of Reconciliation" for Catholics, the impact of the Nairobi Assembly on Protestants, and a new movement towards active participation by Orthodox women in Japan all had an effect on this joint program during International Women's Year. An eagerness to participate in the work of evangelization in Japan and the will to join in concrete action on various issues characterized all discussion groups. This might reflect the work of the majority of women in the grass roots churches who are playing the Church's daily role steadily and with keen insight in the critical situation of the Japanese church today.

(cont'd)

WOMEN SPONSOR ECUMENICAL ASSEMBLY (cont'd)

An interesting point was the tendency common to the various denominations to promote active leadership of women in the women's organization.

It is not appropriate to compare these Women's assembly with other assemblies of men. As women have learned from men's methods, so men should also listen to the voices of women in their actions and ways of thinking, to work together as partners in mission to Japan and the world.

* * * * *

CLIPPINGS FROM THE JAPANESE PRESS

compiled by C. Koriyama
translated by Lee Seaman

"HOME FOR DIVORCED WOMEN," MODERN STYLE -- Cued on by International Women's Year, a Japanese women's action group appealed in mid-October to Tokyo Governor Minobe, calling for construction of with public funds of housing for mothers who with to divorce their husbands but who have nowhere to go. "Because of my personal experience (the Governor is once divorced) I understand the necessity of separation in some cases," Minobe is widely quoted as saying. He promised to examine the qualifications for admission into mother-child dormitories, limited to legally divorced mothers.

Many commentators including a number of women columnists in the press here are warning against change. Since when family quarrels come up the woman will be able to run off to a government dormitory, the dormitories will become a means for wives to intimidate their husbands, the press suggests.

In Japan it is said that women follow their men. But 800 years ago the Tokai-ji Temple in Kamakura was a legal refuge for women violently mistreated by their husbands. Women who gained entry into the temple could take refuge there, and their marriages were legally ended. Some say that the Governor's plan will become a modern variation on this old temple.

WE KNOW IT'S ILLEGAL, BUT LET'S GROW VEGETABLES ON THE RIVERBANK -- To counter high consumer prices let's grow vegetables. Gardening as a hobby becomes an economic plus. Many people in Tokyo have thought about gardening, but the city is famous for limited space. So some people have begun raising food on the bank of the Tama River which borders Tokyo on the west. They raise useful vegetables like green onions, sweet potatoes and spinach. On national holidays the whole family drives to the bank of the river and enjoys being "farmer for a day."

Obviously this is an illegal act in terms of river administration. The river administrator has posted notice boards ordering an end to the gardens. But the "farmers" are showing no intention of stopping their small-scale vegetable gardening. Meanwhile, environmentalists in nature protection groups are protesting that the use of natural fields for vegetable gardens prohibits wild birds from coming in. The river administration has begun compulsory evacuation of the gardens, but the Tama River is long and wide. Once the gardens are removed, there will always be the possibility that another "farmer" will move into the same place.

* * * * *